

Clock Face Miners U11's vs Shevington Sharks U11's – Sunday 11th March 2018

The 2018 version of the Shevvy Sharks Under 11's began their season in the top flight of Group A with a trip to the formidable Clock Face Miners in St. Helens, on a thankfully rare dry day after weeks of most of the different variations of wet weather that never seemed to cease, had seen their original home fixture switched to the away venue due to a waterlogged pitch & to be honest it was amazing it ever got going at all as it was played on a steak & kidney pudding of a pitch that is obviously used on a temporary basis in extreme circumstances, but despite this both teams showed amazing ball skills & footwork throughout that belied the conditions in a truly titanic tussle that proved the Sharks are really up there by merit & will be a force to be reckoned with & feared this season. The way the kids from both sides had to avoid the various small ponds on the pitch was like watching ballet & the Sharks, even though understrength with just 12 players against a full complement of 17 from the opposition, shook off the rust of the close season with hardly a problem & this bodes well for when the dry pitches are available, if ever that is.

The Sharks were on the backfoot immediately as they let the kick off roll dead & were defending their line from the start, this was held successfully as the Miners knocked on after the 3rd tackle, then began a back & forth forward tussle with both teams lines being tested, the Sharks try line defence & line speed was superb today, a fact remarked on by the opposing coaches who were mightily impressed. After several raids on their line were successfully repelled & dummy half scoots from Joey Cox & Bailey Gerrard got the Sharks moving up the field on the front foot, their passing moves started to appear, Harry Townsend got Harlen Smith away on a typical barnstorming run up the left, one of several runs that made good ground, Will Metcalfe took up the mantle and barged further extra yards up the middle, then on the last tackle the ball went left but Townsend spotted a hole behind the marker switched to the right, swatted off a few remaining flat-footed defenders & he strolled in for his first try for the Sharks on his debut & their first of 2018, Joey Cox converted & the Sharks were deservedly in front 0-6.

This only served to prick a shocked Clock Face into action & typically for a junior team when they've scored a try, they conceded straight away. The Miners swept downfield in waves & great handling & perfect backing up saw them slide in at the left corner, conversion missed so now 4-6.

The Sharks were starting to cause mayhem down the left edge & the Miners quickly spotted this, Luke Gledhill & Smith were marauding & punching holes & a great cut out pass saw Smith put Leo Wadsworth away on a long distance flight down the left wing, leaving several defenders sprawling & clutching at thin air to score wide out, converted by Harry Brandon & an even more shocked Clock Face were 4-12 down.

The ref was very busy today & there were a string of penalties for offside with both sides too eager & moving off the mark far too quickly, several high tackles were being punished also. The Sharks didn't do themselves any favours here as a series of these kept the Miners camped on their line & even after all the defensive heroics of Metcalfe, Wadsworth, Gledhill, Brody Lucas & Oliver Fairhurst who were putting their bodies on the line constantly with crunching but draining try line defence, it was bound to crack & eventually Clock Face managed to sneak through some tired legs to get the ball on the line, converted this time so the Sharks turned around still in front narrowly 10-12.

The start of the second half was the turning point of the whole game & the Sharks were guilty of wasting all their previous good work by simply not lining up correctly at the kick off, obviously not switching on again in time & they left poor Harvey Sadler with the whole right side of the field to defend on his own, the kick off went straight down the middle to their fastest kid who was being screamed at to go left which he promptly obliged & flew down the left edge, switched back as our whole cover defence tried to make amends & were wrong-footed as one, a try conceded straight from the kick off, a cardinal sin & they never recovered, bet they don't make that mistake again in a hurry. Conversion successful so behind now at 16-12.

From then it was nip & tuck all the way, young legs grew tired in the clinging mud & most were losing their feet, the Sharks were having to resort to one man tackles but somehow the line speed & try line defending kept up, they kept the Miners at bay, Joey Cox & Louie Fairhurst to the fore here as their right corner was repeatedly under siege, but this was sapping energy & attempts to scoot upfield with clearing runs weren't making the ground, they stopped exploiting the left edge & were resorting to speculative cut out long passes which weren't quite coming off today.

The Miners finally got the Sharks to crack again with another cheeky slide in from close range, but they never looked totally comfortable playing the brave Sharks today & our kids were congratulated at the end by the opposition coaches, you can't get higher praise. Conversion missed so final score 20-12 to the home side but our kids can hold their heads high & go into next Sundays encounter at old rivals West Bank Bears with masses of confidence & optimistic that they'll be ok this year & they fully deserve to be where they are.

There were a few knocks suffered during the game as this was a tough encounter, but all walking wounded were on their feet eating at the end & ready for next week.

Up the Sharks!

Awards:

Top Tackler: William Metcalfe

MOM: Harry Townsend